DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 429 327 CS 510 052

TITLE	Speaking and Listening to Your Child! Ten Fun and Easy Tips.
PUB DATE	1998-00-00
NOTE	17p.
AVAILABLE FROM	EDINFO Press, P.O. Box 5247, Bloomington, IN 47407; Tel: 800-925-7853 (Toll Free); Web site: http://www.indiana.edu/~eric_rec
PUB TYPE	Guides - Non-Classroom (055)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Communication Skills; Elementary Education; Family Environment; *Listening Skills; Nonverbal Communication; *Parent Child Relationship; Reading Aloud to Others

ABSTRACT

This booklet presents parents with 10 "easy and fun" tips for helping them to speak and listen effectively to their children. The tips in the booklet are: be interested; make and keep eye contact; be a good language model; avoid dead-end questions; extend conversations; read aloud regularly; share your thoughts; define and reflect feelings; preserve your children's ideas; and observe cues. It concludes that parents and children working together on speaking and listening will improve communication skills and enrich the whole family's life. (RS)

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Speaking and Listening to Your Child!

Ten Fun and Easy Tips

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

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A Letter to Parents

Dear Parent:

Speaking is more than just a way of communicating information to others. Likewise, listening is more than just "not talking."

Many of us are unaware that speaking also helps us to communicate with ourselves. Talking about our experiences helps us to understand them. Verbalizing our thoughts and feelings allows us to describe unfamiliar experiences in words we are comfortable with. It allows us to take stock of what we already know and to identify what we need to learn.

Speaking serves exactly the same purpose for our children. It allows them to organize and further understand experiences they have already had. It gives them a chance to relate new knowledge to ideas they are familiar with and it enables them to see how their feelings influence their behavior.

As parents, most of us talk more than we listen. Do you really listen when your six-year-old talks to you? *Real* listening is not an easy

job. It is an active process which involves paying attention and trying to understand the message behind what another person is saying.

By learning to speak and listen effectively to your children, you help them develop a positive self-image. In addition, you will strengthen your own image of yourself as a good parent!

1

Be interested.

Help your child to become more comfortable sharing her thoughts by demonstrating that you care. Be aware of her body language, then encourage her to put her feelings into words. For example, if she seems to be annoyed or angry and begins sulking, you might say, "You don't seem very happy. It's okay for you to tell me that you're mad. You will probably feel better after you talk about it."

2 Make and keep eye contact.

You probably know when your child is not paying attention to what you say. But did you ever think that he might sometimes think the same thing about you? By making and keeping eye contact with your child when he is speaking, you demonstrate how a good listener listens and you let him know that what he says is important.

Be a good language model.

3

Children are influenced by and learn to imitate the language used by those around them. Parents, teachers, playmates, and television—all of these models influence a child's attitude toward language. The way you speak with and listen to your child is the largest and most influential factor in determining how she will communicate with others.

4 Avoid dead-end questions.

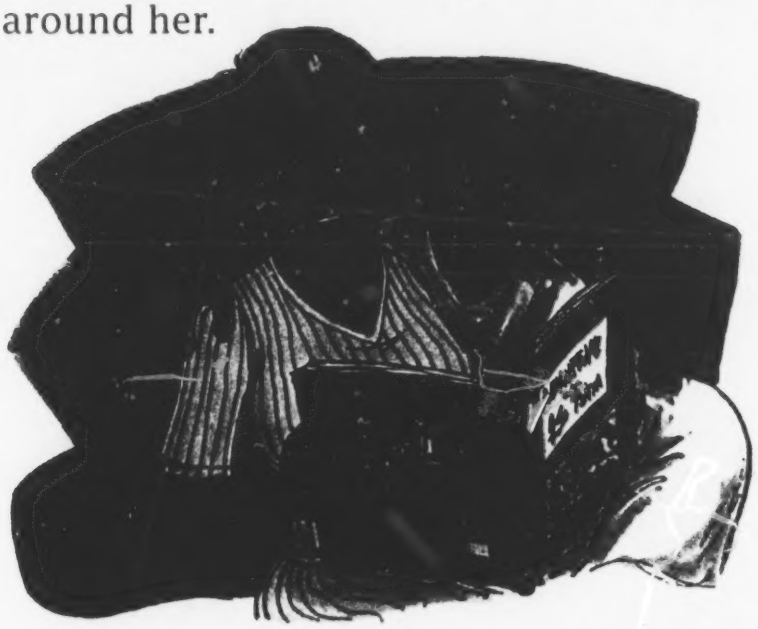
Open up conversation rather than cutting it off. Instead of saying, "Did you learn anything in school today?" you might start a conversation by asking, "What stories did you read at school today?" or "Who did you play with at recess?" If you want to start a conversation with your child, avoid questions which require a "yes or no," or a "right" answer in response.

Extend conversations. 5

Pick up on your child's conversation and extend it. If your child says, "Michael Jordan is my favorite basketball player." You might ask him, "What does Michael Jordan do that you like seeing?" When you incorporate your child's own words into your speech, you strengthen his confidence in his own verbal skills and let him know that his ideas and opinions are valued.

6 Read aloud regularly.

By reading aloud regularly with your child, you can improve her communication skills. Spoken language serves as a bridge between the new ideas represented in books and things she already knows. Reading aloud also gets your child used to the language patterns of literature, improves her vocabulary, and increases her understanding of the world around her.



Share your thoughts.

7

Let your child know what you are thinking about. If you are wondering how to arrange the furniture or trying to decide about a gift for a relative, ask your child questions like, "I'm not sure where to put this chair. Where do you think would be a good place?" or "What do you think Grandma would like for her birthday?" Be sure to take his opinions seriously by discussing the practical implications of his suggestion.

8 Define and reflect feelings.

If you think something is bothering your child, make the best guess you can about what it is. If you are right, then both of you can discuss ways to cope with the problem. If you are wrong, he has the opportunity to tell you that and to talk about what is really bothering him.

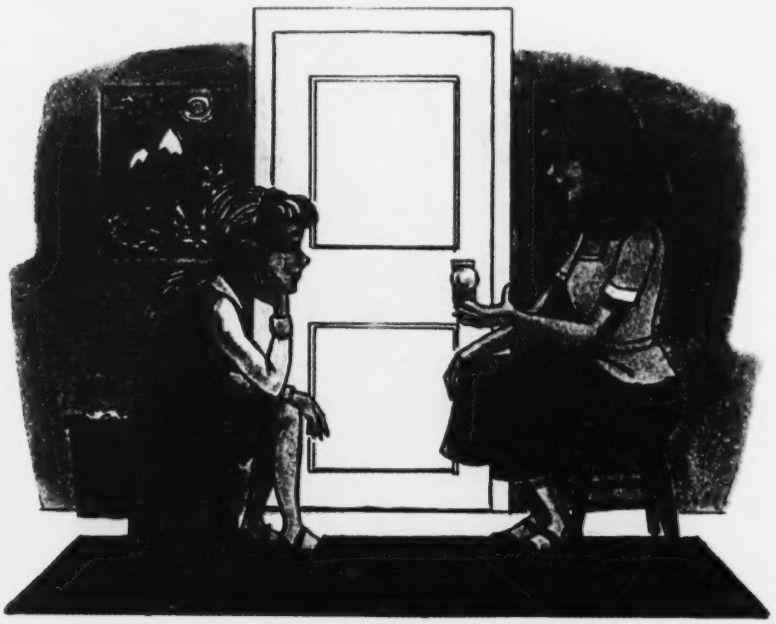
Preserve your children's ideas.

9

Whether you write down her thoughts in a journal, have her speak into a tape recorder, or record her on video, preserving the ideas expressed by your child can have many benefits. Just taking the time to record what she says or writes will boost her confidence. Reading, speaking, or even singing for an audio or video tape provides valuable communication practice—and you and your child will be able to enjoy it for years to come!

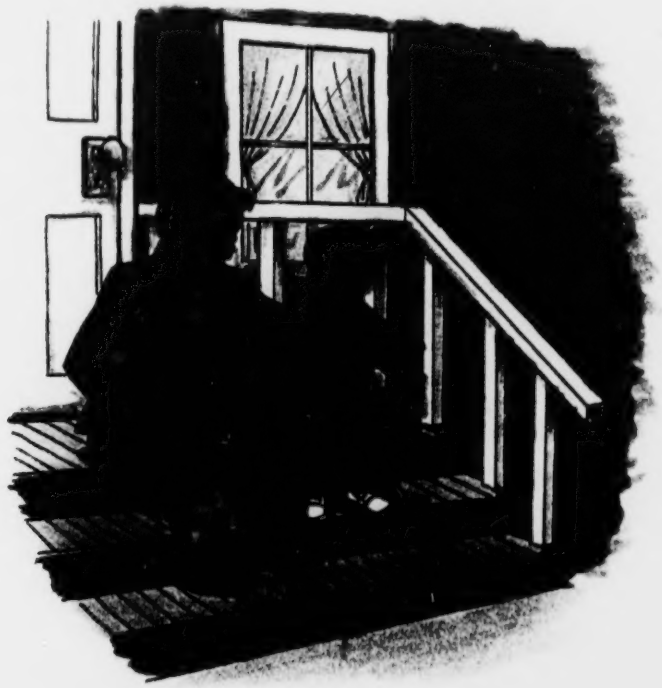
10 Observe cues.

Your child will give you hints that let you know when she is ready to end a conversation. These hints may be non-verbal, so pay close attention to body language. Slumped shoulders might indicate a change in subject matter is necessary. When she starts staring into space or giving really silly responses, it's probably time to stop.



Conclusion

Use as many of these tips as are appropriate for your child's age and experience. Let your child be your guide and practice listening to find out what works best. Working together on speaking and listening to each other will not only improve communication skills, it will enrich your whole family's life!



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